

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Most Kind



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Islam is a Religion of Peace

In different parts of the world, particularly, in Muslim countries, various incidents of violence take place. And, these incidents are mostly linked to Islamic extremism and terrorism. Such incidents have influenced Muslims in different ways and, particularly, in the West. Any Muslim, practicing his religion and expressing the craving to live under the banner of Islam, is branded as a fundamentalist or extremist in the West. Any Muslim man, strolling down a busy street in London or Paris, and having a beard or a scarf on his head, is mostly considered to be a terrorist who has probably got a gun hidden somewhere on his person. Muslim women who use veils cannot walk in the Western world without being mocked as being oppressed or being ridiculous. Nevertheless, the important discussion is to ask; "Are such beliefs and opinions about Islam really reasonable?"

A faulty stereotype which has arisen in the West nowadays is judging Islam by the behavior of few of its people. Adopting this stereotype, Western society have, intentionally, judged the desperate actions of many Muslims, and have branded it as Islam. Such stereotype is clearly not objective and, in fact, misrepresents the reality of Islam. Make a sweeping statement in such a way is not seen as being impartial, yet we find that the Western world is leading in circulating this viewpoint on Islam. So what is the truth about Islam? What are the explanations to dismiss the myths which have been formed and spread so wildly?

The best way to examine Islam is to merely scrutinize its belief system. Go through its sources - Quran and Sunnah, and find what they have to say. This is the best way of finding truth about what Islam says about terrorists and terrorism. A person who is honestly probing the truth, will do it no other way. The very name Islam comes from the Arabic word 'Salama' and that means peace. Islam is a religion which is based upon attaining peace through the obedience to the will of Allah.

Thus, by this very simple definition, one can determine as to what the nature of this religion is. If a religion is standing on the idea of peace, then why is it that so many acts done by its believers are conflicting to peace? The answer is humble. Such actions, if not certified by the religion, have no place in it. They do not qualify to be Islamic and should not be considered as Islamic.

In particular, the word jihad spends shivers down the spines of many Westerners. They naively associate this term with ferocity and oppression. Nevertheless, it should be clarified that the meaning of jihad, as a 'holy war', is something which is totally distant from Islam. By going through the authentic sources of Islam, one is able to know that the true meaning of jihad is to strive/make effort in the way of Allah. Thus striving in the way of Allah call be both nonviolent and physical. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said: "The best jihad is (by) the one who strives against his own self for Allah, the Mighty and Majestic."

By monitoring and fighting against one's desires, the Muslims can then also physically wield themselves in the path of Allah. It is the physical or combative jihad which gets so much disapproval. Because of the utter obliviousness about this type of jihad, Islam is viewed as terror, and Muslims are considered as terrorists in the West. Conversely, the very purpose of this physical jihad is to elevate the word of Allah as the uppermost. By doing this it frees and unshackles all those who are crying out for freedom all over the world. If only the pacifists had their way, then the world would certainly be filled with disorder and malice. The combative jihad seeks to correct this as Allah says in holy Quran: "And if Allah did not check one set of people by means of another, the earth would be full of mischief. But Allah is full of bounty to the worlds" (Surah Al-Baqarah 2:251).

This combative jihad is mostly defensive, and it is something which is ordered by Allah upon the Muslims. Through this order the troubled and weak are liberated from the domination of the world: "And what is the matter with you that you do not fight in the cause of Allah and for those weak, ill-treated and oppressed among men, women and children whose only cry is; 'Our Lord, rescue us from this town whose people are oppressors and raise for us from you one who will protect and raise for us from you one who will help'." (Surah An-Nisa 4:75) Anyone who is aware of the early history of Islam, will recognize that all those nations and empires which came under the fold of Islam were undeniably oppressed. When the companions of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) went out for the offensive jihad against the Egyptians, the Persians and the Romans, we see that the people did not repel them at all. Conversely, they accepted Islam on such a scale that it is unimaginable that the jihad of Islam could be anything else without a liberation for these people; a liberty from centuries of despotism.



Role of New Media in Social and Political Development

By Mohammad Zahir Akbari

What is new media? New media consists of the Internet, mobile phones, and social media networks such as blogs and micro-blogs, social networking websites, video-sharing sites, and others. In other words, New Media has largely put an end to the monopoly of traditional media; it is a broad term that describes a range of unfettered media utilized for many different purposes. Some of the things that make new media different from traditional media (radio, television, newspapers and magazines) include: They are usually interactive, they are often audience-created and user-driven, they function in real-time, they are usually borderless, the information is often short-lived, they are more difficult to regulate - and to censor, the infrastructure for publishing or broadcasting is usually cheaper for individuals to access and they do not always adhere to journalistic standards and ethics.

New media can play a key part in reinforcing transparency in democratic processes and its institutionalization. Citizens use new media to monitor social, political or administrative issues or else a nation of sheep will beget a government of wolves. In the 2012 presidential elections in Russia, activists created a new social media platform 'Citizen Control' specifically designed to bring all social groups together to monitor the elections. Also Afghan citizens exposed a lot of social or political frauds through their simple handy media such as mobile phone since 2001. Infact, traditional media's watchdog role is significantly enhanced by its utilization of new media as both a source of information and a mouthpiece for democratic process. By monitoring social media discourse, observing citizen journalism postings, and by creating new media of their own through blogs and micro-blogs on official media websites, traditional media's elections investigations have become faster, more diverse, and more interactive. In addition, New Media role as public educator; the decentralized, multi-media, and interactive nature of new media has opened up its potential as a public education tool. For example, international organizations, civil society groups, cultural and political activist make extensive use of facebook, tweeter, YouTube and other video sites to share educative and informative stuffs. Thus, Common users often amused with learning or teaching about health, nutrition and other social issues through mobile phone.

To make better use of the media - in conflict or post-conflict countries such as Afghanistan- there is a dire need to promote media literacy as a safeguard against hate-speech in otherwise volatile circumstances. An audience that is educated in the tenants of media professionalism is more likely to demand high quality media content and play active role in institutionalizing of a unifying political literature. Media literacy is also important for new or transitioning democracies. In these circumstances legal frameworks are usually under development and will greatly impact the future state of independent and free media. Furthermore, citizens may experience a rather sudden explosion of news sources and media formats after decades or more of controlled and sparse media. The greater

the media literacy, the more prepared audiences (and information providers) will be in deciphering messages and recognizing value and credibility. Media literacy builds an understanding of the role of media in society as well as essential skills of inquiry and self-expression necessary for citizens of a democracy. Media literacy includes understanding code of conduct and knowing the quickly changing media landscapes. This is particularly relevant in today's age of social media, and ever developing media technology. Media literacy also involves recognition of the use of, and power of, subtext. Subtext is the context or background of the primary message and may include images, background audio, and framing, each of which conveys specific messages, associations, and insinuations. In short, media literacy is about developing critical thinking skills and overall awareness. This in turn fosters pluralistic media as well as media who are challenged to improve upon professionalism. Media literacy gives rise to a population who understand the media landscape as a whole, including the impacts of legal frameworks and the importance of media safety. Overall, in twenty-first century every individual can play the role of media if we literate ourselves especially notice the following points: (1) Cautiousness and knowing that we ruled by Media, (2) Recognition of commercial interests behind messaging, (3) Recognizing the impact of media monopolies on media impartiality, (4) Understanding the inescapable influence of values and views of the media makers, (5) Understand that control of media is control of thoughts, (7) Recognizing the impact on culture by media message and recognize the difference between text and subtext, (8) Understanding how media affects our thoughts, attitudes and future generation, (9) Recognizing that there is always a larger story or picture to what is being presented, Recognising bias, misinformation, or inaccuracies, (10) Recognising "filters" that we use when interpreting media messages, such as our own experiences or educations, (11) Developing skills to create one's own messages, (12) Understanding the power and role that citizen journalism plays in today's media landscape as an additional category of information providers. This role is especially in the contexts of limited (or entirely absent) freedom for traditional media, (14) Recognizing the different impacts of time-based media (such as movies) as opposed to static media (such as photos), (15) Understanding how audience memory works - what they will remember immediately after consuming a message and what they remember months later, (16) Understanding how emotion plays into message interpretation and memory, (17) Recognizing how messages can be manipulated to enhance emotional responses (including the use of frames, angles, and lighting), (18) Understanding the impact of legal frameworks on media messaging, Knowledge of the tenants of media professionalism such as balanced reporting, right of reply, and protection of source identities, (19) Understanding the impact of self-censorship (the power of fear) on media messaging, (20) Understanding how to advocate for positive change in the media system.

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Nusra Rebranding Old Wine in New Bottle

By Manish Rai

Exclusive for the Daily Outlook

Jabhat-Al-Nusra Front, once al-Qaeda's official branch in Syria, has cut ties with the parent organisation with the approval of al-Qaeda central leadership. Nusra Front is one of the largest and most effective rebel groups in Syria. It controls territory in the north, west and south of the country and commands approximately 6,000 to 7,000 battle hardened fighters. Originally founded by Salafist militants back in January 2012, Nusra Front emerged as one of the strongest forces in the Syrian civil war. Now Nusra will be known by a new name, Jabhat-Fateh-Al-Sham (Sham Liberation Front). This significant development did not just took place suddenly. There has been pressure from within the al-Nusra Front ranks to break away from al-Qaeda for almost a year, because some of the Nusra operatives believed that the al-Qaeda "label" is hampering their cause in Syria. This recently led to a comprehensive debate among the group's leaders, both locally and abroad, who came to the conclusion that it is the right time to break affiliation with the al-Qaeda. Without the al-Qaeda tag and with a new name, Jabhat hopes to change its previous reputation for brutality and start afresh. So that it can embed more deeply in the Syrian insurgency.

Despite after announcing divorce with al-Qaeda, Abu Mohammad Al Julani, commander of Nusra Front who showed his face for the first time in public did not break his loyalty pledge to it. There were clear signals he was not abandoning global jihad ideology of Qaeda. Mr. Julani dressed as the late al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden once did, in army fatigues and a white turban, vowing to "protect jihad in Syria". We should not be confused by this maneuver of Nusra it remains as potentially dangerous, and as radical, as ever. In severing its ties to the parent outfit the organization is more clearly than ever demonstrating its long-term approach towards Syria, in which it seeks to embed within revolutionary dynamics and encourage Islamist unity to overshadow its enemies. In this sense, the Nusra Front (and now Jabhat Fateh al-Sham) tries to differentiate itself from its staunch enemy the Islamic State, which always acts alone and in outright competition with other rebel factions. Instead of unification the Islamic State always promotes division. This move of Nusra front to project itself as pure Syrian group is clear reflection of a new and far more

potentially effective method of carrying al-Qaeda's jihadist agenda. Which focused on collective, gradualist, and flexible action. To explain this strategy in simple words. We can say that al-Qaeda is coordinating its Syrian affiliate's break up of ties with its central leadership for the sake of preserving the long-term relevance of the Nusra Front and its jihadi strategic objectives. The ideological ties between al-Qaeda and Jabhat Fateh al-Sham will always remain strong. This move was very cleverly planned now a significant portion of Syria's mainstream opposition will see this as a positive step and will move to embrace Nusra chief Julani's call for unity. As a result of this Jabhat Fateh al-Sham will now seek to intensify its long-standing call for large-scale mergers, united front and military coalitions in the key areas of the current battlefield. The most significant potential consequence of this could be a merger of Jabhat Fateh al-Sham with the other prominent jihadi group Ahrar al-Sham. Even last year Nusra, Ahrar al-Sham and several other factions in northern Syria formed a new alliance called Jaish al-Fatah or The Army of Conquest. But later on Nusra broke away from Jaish al-Fatah amid reports of tensions with Ahrar al-Sham over its al-Qaeda connections. This modus-operadi of severing ties with parent organisation and still carrying on with it's a global jihadist agenda was previously adopted by other Qaeda affiliates like- al Shabaab in Somalia and Ansar al-Sharia in Libya and Nusra is just another example of this. By carefully examining the video speech of Mr Julani we can easily make out that new organization Jabhat Fateh-Al-Sham's principles are the same as its predecessor Nusra Front. The first goal for the renamed organization is to "work toward establishing the religion of Allah, having His sharia (law) as legislation" and to "establish justice amongst all people," Julani says. It will "strive toward unity with all groups" and "to unify the ranks of the Mujahideen and liberate the land of Al Sham from the rule of the tyrant that is Bashar al Assad and his allies" Julani further mentioned in his speech. These were the same goals which al-Qaeda's is pursuing since the Syrian civil war broke out. Jabhat in the short term may argue to establish a unified front in Syrian conflict against President Assad just to get more funding, arms, and breathing space from the US and Russian airstrikes.

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